

Is the United States Moving Towards Engagement in the Ideological War? <https://westminster-institute.org/articles/is-the-united-states-moving-towards-engagement-in-the-ideological-war/>

The House Armed Services Subcommittee on Emerging Threats and Capabilities has recently held hearings on the terrorist threat. While they are garnering less attention than the hearings of the Homeland Security Committee under Rep. Peter King's chairmanship, the news coming out of them is promising for those who feel the United States is fighting this war with duct-tape over its mouth. Rep. Mac Thornberry (R-TX), who chairs the subcommittee, revealed that "there has been a lot of discussion in recent weeks over the ideological aspects of the war." What might this mean for America's fight against Islamist terrorism? Read more here...

On June 22, 2011, The House Armed Services Committee's Subcommittee on Emerging Threats and Capabilities held a hearing entitled, "Ten Years On: The Evolution of the Terrorist Threat Since 9/11." The overarching aim was an assessment of the current threat. More pointedly, the question was are we winning or are we losing the war against terrorism, and if we are losing, what do we need to do differently? Author Peter Bergen said the news is all good, we are winning, and the ideology of the enemy is imploding. Bryan Jenkins, of the RAND Corporation, was more circumspect: "We have made considerable progress in the past ten years. Al Qaeda's operational capabilities have clearly been denigrated. But we haven't dented its determination one bit." Sebastian Gorka, of National Defense University and the Foundation for Defense of Democracies, was far more cautionary. He argued, in short, that while we are winning the battles, we are not winning the war. America still does not fully understand the enemy, he argued; and tactical successes do not necessarily lead to strategic victory. Gorka said the lack of understanding of the enemy is due, in large part, to the belief in Washington that the religious character of the enemy's ideology should not be discussed.

Much of the hearing was taken up with questions about Al Qaeda in the wake of bin Laden's death and with the current war in Afghanistan (If the majority of Afghans do want to see girls educated, as Peter Bergen suggested, let the Afghan people do the educating, suggested Rep. Loretta Sanchez (D-CA), since we are having so much trouble in keeping our own schools funded. She went on to argue, "We have the best equipped, best trained, best educated military that the world has ever seen, but it still a limited resource."

Only in the closing moments of the hearing did the topic come back around to the ideological war. Chairman Thornberry raised the topic, acknowledging the difficulties inherent in it: "Some people argue this has to be fought out within the Islamic faith, that we have no role in it. Other people say that we have a much greater role, and that we have diffuse messages coming out, and nobody knows really... So we're not doing anything very well." Jenkins responded that we do not need to take on the jihadist ideology. Any attempt to craft a specific counter-jihadi message would get lost in the noise of the already massive communications around the globe. Moreover, Jenkins said, to take on jihadist ideology would be "intervening in an area where we don't really have the credentials to do so." The Muslim community itself has to deal with Al Qaeda, he went on to say. Bergen followed in a similar vein. We cannot participate in the ideological debate, Bergen said, "because we are not Islamic scholars... To get into an arcane debate about Islamic theology won't work."

Sebastian Gorka responded: "With regard to this question, are we allowed to be part of this discourse inside Islam? After September 11th, of course we are. We have a dog in this fight and we have every right to be part of this discourse. We have to remember that the Cold War, for all of its thousands of nuclear warheads and aircraft carriers and battletanks across the German plain was won on the ideational plane. It was won primarily on the grounds of ideology and we need to do the same kinds of

things today as we did then. We have to start with who we are. We have to be clear about what it is these individuals threaten in our nation....On our current label for this part of the war, Countering Violent Extremism, this is deleterious to the national security of the United States. We did not say when we were fighting the Klu Klux Klan that we are fighting “violent extremism.” We said that these were white supremacists and racists. You have to be clear about the ideology, and what they say about themselves. This is an ideology of global jihad, not a grab-bag of violent extremism. So let’s begin to be specific and let’s start to take the fight to the enemy on the ideological plain as well as on the kinetic.”

The question now is whether the United States will finally engage the enemy where he is most occupied—in the world of ideas. The fact that Thornberry is even taking the issue out from under the rug is a promising sign.

Read Dr. Sebastian Gorka’s full testimony here: <http://www.scribd.com/doc/60381601/The-Evolution-of-the-Terrorist-Threat-by-Dr-Sebastian-Gorka>

Listen to the full hearing here: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gfmN86SlpKY>